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TEXTUAL CRITICISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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I. THE MASSORETIC TEXT.

Textual Criticism, it cannot be too often repeated, is the study which aims to restore the exact wording of a document whose first draft is lost and which is consequently known to us only by one or more copies. The copies, of course, may be immediate (taken directly from the author's own manuscript) or remote (taken from a copy) by any number of degrees. The work of the critic (I shall use this word throughout for the critic of the text) is therefore negative. He removes errors in copies before him, but cannot restore what the copies do not contain. His work may be properly compared with that of the proof-reader now an indispensable *attache* of every printing office.

The regular employment of a proof-reader is one of the evidences of the imperfection of all attempts at securing accurate reproduction of written documents. In spite of the compositor's generally high sense of fidelity—as witness the rule, “follow copy though it goes out of the window”—it is yet found unsafe to trust his work without careful revision. All important publications have their proof read more than once, and yet it is scarcely possible to find a book in which there is not an occasional typographical error. Should the proof-reader lose his ‘copy’ but receive two proofs of the same matter, and attempt to restore the original by comparing the two he would become a critic of his text.

In order to an adequate notion of the complexity of criticism when we have to do with ancient literature we must think of the different conditions of transmission in former times. In our printed editions of a thousand or ten thousand copies mechanical means secure uniformity when the type is once correctly fixed in the form. We are therefore well repaid in spending an amount of care on the proof which would be impossible were we preparing a single copy only. But

this is what the *scribe* does. He prepares a single copy of his text. If the price paid for his book will justify it he may go over his copy once more and correct it by the original. Where a Greek or Roman publisher employed a large number of scribes he sometimes had a corrector who inspected their work and removed its errors so far as he could by interlineation or marginal additions, cancelling wrong words in the text or occasionally erasing them. To destroy an inaccurate copy would scarcely be thought of, on account of the cost. Verbal accuracy, however, was not insisted upon by the purchaser, and so the standard of fidelity was not high even among professional scribes. There is no certainty, moreover, that the copies of ancient documents which have come down to us, were made by professional scribes. Every scholar—every man who could read and write—would find it pleasant and (unless very wealthy) profitable to make his own copy of books in which he was interested. His own edification was the aim he had before him, with no thought of posterity as likely to enjoy his book or to puzzle over it. He would therefore pay more attention to the sense of his author than to the order of words. His own spelling would appear in preference to that of his author. He would have little hesitation in emendation where he supposed a preceding scribe to have made a mistake, and so would often substitute an easier (and erroneous) reading for the true one.

Bearing these facts in mind we shall easily see how, what is true of the New Testament* is probably true of other books—that the corruption of the text is most likely to occur at an early period of its history. All important ramifications of transmission (we are told concerning the New Testament, cf. W. and H., p. 93) preceded the fifth century, and we are able to show that “great divergences were in existence at latest by the end of the second century” (p. 113). The fact of corruption becomes so obvious after a while that a cure is sought. This leads on the one side to greater stringency in the rules for copyists. On the other side, if the copies already in existence show troublesome diversities, a standard text is made up by some recognized authority. His recension is introduced by governmental regulation or is favored by his reputation and gradually displaces the others in common use. The New Testament text as settled by Lucian became the received text of the middle ages. The text of the Koran was made uniform by decree of a Caliph and as early as the time of Pericles we

* For what I have here said of the New Testament I have depended upon Westcott and Hort in their Introduction in the second volume of their “New Testament in Greek.” The abundance of material providentially preserved to us for the criticism of the New Testament enables us to trace in regard to it the process through which most ancient books of importance have gone.

hear of editorial care exerted in behalf of an authorized Homer. Now in so far as these standard editions produce uniformity they are to their immediate readers a benefit. Unfortunately the ability and the materials were generally wanting, which should secure a genuinely critical edition. It has been left for modern times to make extensive collations and settle the rules for selecting the better readings. In the formation of a standard edition ancient editors either relied upon some one copy already in high repute, or they attempted to combine two or more divergent texts so as to include all the material of both except where this was obviously impossible. The removal of supposed grammatical or rhetorical errors was a natural part of the process. It has recently been pointed out that the revision of Lucian followed this method of mixture or 'conflation' (W. and H., p. 132 sqq.).

The question which comes before the student of the Old Testament is whether it also has gone through such a process as we have already traced in regard to the New Testament. It has sometimes been supposed that this book has been exempt from the common course of transmission. If this were true we should be spared the work of the critic. But if we attributed the exemption to special divine providence we should still be puzzled to explain why one part of the Scriptures should be preserved from influences to which another part was fully exposed. The probabilities are all against such miraculous transmission. In order to settle the true state of the case we need to examine the phenomena of the Old Testament text. This will be conveniently done by looking separately at the Massoretic recension, at the Septuagint and at the other sources of information.

THE MASSORETIC TEXT.

It is known to all who have given attention to the subject that the MSS. of the Hebrew Bible in our possession show remarkable uniformity. The labors of Kennicott and De Rossi in collecting variants resulted in nothing of importance. Differences in writing *plene* or *defective*, the substitution of *Jehovah* for *Adhonai*, or of the *Q'ri* for the *K'thibh*—these were about all they could show for their pains. The reasons for this remarkable uniformity are not obscure. In the first place the scribes of the Hebrew Bible (especially of the Synagogue rolls, but their accuracy here affect favorably all their work) are under a stringent system of rules intended to secure minute fidelity—and efficient in securing it. These rules prescribe the materials for the sacred books, and designate the qualifications of the writer. They enjoin the exact observance of the traditional divisions (paragraphs and verses). They define the space to be left between words, between

lines and between books. Special precautions are taken for the paying of due reverence to the divine name. The extraordinary marks and letters are described. In short nothing is neglected that will secure exact conformity to the model. In the second place we have the Massorah. This is the well known body of notes found in the larger (so-called Rabbinical) Bibles, and very much abbreviated in the common editions. It gives the number of times in which a certain word is found (if at all rare) and takes pains to call attention to similar verses or phrases in which the scribe is liable to mistake. It counts the verses, and even the letters of the different books. It forms in fact a complete 'hedge' about the letter, so that the scribe who follows it can scarcely go wrong. Again, we have a minute system of vocalization and accentuation which fixes the grammatical form and the connection of each word. All these means have fixed the text of the Hebrew Bible for us so that it is substantially the same in all editions. This means, of course, that all existing copies are really conformed to a single original. The question that now arises is—what is this single prototype? If it be the real original of the books we need go no further. It seems probable, however, that it is not an original but a copy chosen at some later period. It may be a copy made up from more than one MS. after the method of Lucian's recension. To answer the question intelligently we need to consider two things. First, can we trace back the method of the scribes to the time of the writers of the Scriptures? Secondly, does the text itself bear any marks of corruption?*

First, then, how far back can we trace the extraordinary care of the Jews for purity of text? The tract Masseketh Sopherim, which contains the rules for the scribes, may be as old as the eighth century of our era. A few of the rules are found also in the Mishna, which was written down in the fourth (?) century. The Massorah did not reach its final form till the sixteenth century if it did then. Some few Massoretic data, however, are also as old as the Talmud. The vowel-points were invented after the fifth century of our era. We may say, then, that the Massoretic *system* may be traced to the early part of the Christian era, and to this agrees the fact that the translations of the Old Testament made in the second and fourth centuries show substantially the Massoretic text. It is obvious that a system which can be traced a certain distance can be no guarantee for what goes still further back, all we can say is that the Massoretic system has success-

* It may be well to remind the reader that corruption in the critical sense does not imply that the text in which it occurs is worthless, or even for popular use seriously impaired. Any copy is *corrupt* which varies even minutely from its original.

fully preserved for us, even in its minor features, a single* MS. of perhaps the first century. How much older it may have been we cannot determine. We may be able to determine approximately whether it represents the autograph as correctly as itself is represented in its descendants.

Secondly, we ask therefore, what evidences are there in the text itself as to its purity? Here the answer, of course, must be to show corruption if we can. The evidence may be arranged under three heads:

1. Some facts go to show that the Massoretic text was not regarded as absolutely perfect even by those who took such good care of it. The existence of the notes called *Q'ri* is one of these facts. Over two thousand words in the text of the Old Testament are corrected by a *Q'ri*. The majority of the corrections are insignificant, consisting of the insertion or omission of a vowel-letter or its transfer from one place to another.† Some of them (though not many) express the desire of the public reader to avoid offensive words in the service of the congregation. But a number are intended to be corrections of textual errors.‡ Besides (as we know) in a number of places words not in the text are inserted by marginal notes, and in others the margin directs that words in the text be omitted in the reading. We need not pause to examine these corrections. All we care to learn from them is that even the reverential treatment of Jewish grammarians discovers errors of transmission in the text. Had the Massoretic system always been in force--had the text been under such a system from its first publication, such errors could not have crept in as undoubtedly do exist among those noted in this way, nor could they have been *supposed* to exist by the traditional guardians of the letter. Certain phenomena in the text itself and so anterior to the Massorah point in the same direction. They are the so-called *extraordinary points*. An example is Num. III., 39—"the whole number of the Levites whom Moses and Aaron numbered—the word *W'aharon* has an unusual point over each letter. The punctuator evidently meant that

* The conclusion that uniformity of text presupposes a single original is so obvious that it is difficult to see how any one should hesitate to admit it. If the original were the autograph, it would at once be seen. But the reasoning is the same when we consider only a single group of MSS. which agree more closely among themselves than any of them agree with other copies. Of course the value of the Massoretic original is not prejudged by this assertion. It might be a model made up by the comparison of different texts. Even in that case it would not (except in *Q'ri* and *K'thibh*) put before us the testimony of its sources in such a way as to be useful to the critic.

† E. g., אָכָא of the text becomes אָכו in the margin, עִיּוֹת becomes עִיּוֹת.

‡ E. g., אָמְנָה (correction for אָמְנָה), אָנֶרֶץ (for אָנֶרֶץ, once *vice versa* also), עָל (for אָל a number of times), הַשָּׂרָה (for הָאֲרָמָה), הָאֵלָה (for הָאֵהָל), הֵם פְּרוּצִים (for הַמְּפֻרָצִים), וְזָכוּר (for וְהַמְּפֻרָצִים), וְזָכוּר (for וְזָכוּר)—these are a few samples of the more important.

the word should be erased* from the text. On the other hand the *suspended letters* are corrections by insertion—most evident in Judg. XVIII., where *Moshe* (מֹשֶׁה) has thus been changed to *M'nasse* (מְנַסֶּה). We find, moreover, that Jewish tradition asserts that changes were made in the text by the scribes ("Ezra"). Eighteen such changes are enumerated by the Massorah under the head *Tikkun Sopherim* or *Tikkun Ezra*. The first example given is a good one. In Gen. XVIII., 22 we read in our present text, "And the men turned thence and went towards Sodom, and Abraham was yet standing before Jehovah." The implication of the Massorah is that the original reading was—"and Jehovah [in contrast with the others] still stood before Abraham." This was, however, thought to be derogatory to the divine dignity and the passage was changed as we now read it. As already said there are eighteen such cases recorded by the Massorah and with them should be put the five (or four) cases of "*Ittur Sopherim*" or omission of a conjunction formerly found in the text.

2. There are verses in our Hebrew text which bear marks of corruption not noted by Jewish grammarians, at least not like those given above. One of the plainest of these is 1 Sam. XIII., 1. It reads literally translated, "The son of a year was Saul in his reigning and two years he reigned over Israel." It is parallel (except the numeral) with 2 Sam. v., 4, "David was thirty years old when he became king, forty years he reigned." It seems impossible to doubt that the former verse gave similar information to the latter. Two words became illegible, so that the verse can only be rendered, "Saul was . . . years old when he became king and he reigned . . . two years over Israel." All sorts of conjectures are made as to the missing numbers, but none of the versions give us any help. Prov. XXX., 1 is another verse that we can hardly suppose always to have read as we now read it. In Num. XVI., 1 a word is lost—object of *wayyiqqah*. 1 Sam. VI., 18 in a con-

* This is in accordance with what we know of ancient book making, where a word wrongly inserted was not erased or crossed out (literally) but designated by such points. According to the *Ochla W'Ochla* there are fifteen words with extraordinary points (in some of them only a single letter is pointed). Ten words not in the text are inserted by the *Q'ri*, eight words of the text are omitted by the *Q'ri*, fifteen words are by the Massorah divided each into two, eight pairs of words are united, each pair being made one word. The Massorah recognizes five cases of wrong division of words, three cases where *kaph* should be *beth* and three where the reverse error is found; two words have *he* instead of *kaph*; four have a superfluous *lamedh*, while one has lost a *lamedh*; six have *beth* which should be *mem* and one the reverse; five have a superfluous *mem* and five lack a *mem* that belongs to them; in six and seven, respectively, the same is true of *nun*; four have a suspended letter; eighteen have an erroneous interchange of *taw* with another letter; twenty erroneously insert or omit a *he*; twelve instances of an inverted *nun* are found; in twenty-four cases *he* is written for *aleph*; in two *daleth* is lacking. This conspectus, which is incomplete, shows that the amount of error indicated by the *K'thūth* is really not inconsiderable. If we assume that the corrections are various readings inserted from MSS. it would still be evident that the Massoretic text has not entirely escaped corruption.

text which presents no difficulties, is obscure and probably corrupt. Other examples are 2 Sam. XXIII., 8 and 1 Chron. XXVI., 24, 25. In all these passages the difficulty is serious and we have no remedy. In others we can discover the source of the error. This may be wrong division of words as in Ps. XXV., 17, where a *w* has been misplaced.* In Ps. XXXV., 7 a word (שָׁהַת) has been misplaced, so likely in Ps. XXXII., 5. In Jer. XXVII., 1 the name Jehoichim has crept into the place of Zedekiah (notice verse 3). It may be that a marginal gloss has crept into the text in some cases—notably Jer. X., 11 where an Aramaic sentence is found in a pure Hebrew passage.

3. Light is thrown upon the transmission of literary productions at a very early date, by a comparison of those portions of the Old Testament which occur twice—Ps. XIV. with Ps. LIII.; 2 Sam. XXII. with Ps. XVIII.; some other portions of Psalms; the parallel portions of Kings and Chronicles; 2 Kgs. XVIII., XIX. with Is. XXXVII., XXXVIII.; 2 Kgs. XXIV. with Jer. LII. Even the recurrence of a single name will show us something here. The well-known Jerubbaal (Gideon) is once called (2 Sam. XI., 21) Jerubbesheth. The substitution of *besbeth* (shame) for Baal (the name of the false god) has evidently taken place here. Such a substitution is probably the work of Jewish editors after the closing of the canon. We find it also in the case of Ishbosheth (= Eshbaal, also called Ishwi, where the second part of the name seems to be a fragment of the tetragrammaton) and Mephibosheth (= Meribbaal). That the change is of late date is shown by the fact that the older form is preserved by Chronicles, whose author therefore had no scruples about writing or pronouncing the word Baal.

This is not the place for an extended collation of the differences in the longer passages referred to above. I think, however, that any one who takes the pains to compare them will come to the decision that they show all the more common forms of scrivener's error. Vowel-letters are (as we might expect) frequently inserted in one copy where not found in the other.† Small words are omitted or inserted, as the conjunctions or *kol* (all). Words nearly alike in appearance or in meaning are exchanged.‡ At least one case is found where the eye of the

* The present reading is,

“The troubles of my heart they have eased [enlarged]
From my straits bring me out.”

The proposed change makes it accord with the context which is throughout a prayer,

“The troubles of my heart do thou ease
And from my straits bring me out.”

† In Ps. liii. we find אֱלֹהִים where Ps. xiv. has יְהוָה.

‡ עָלֶיָּהּ (Ps. xiv., 1) becomes עָלַי, כִּי (v. 3) becomes כֵּן. In 2 Sam. xxii., 8 we find הַשָּׁמַיִם where Ps. xviii. has הָרִים and a little later וַיִּדָּא is represented by וַיִּרָּא (v. 11). יָם (v. 16) has become מִים, צָרָה stands for צָרָה, נָבִיר for נָבִיר.

scribe rested upon a word at its second occurrence instead of its first, so that he omitted a phrase—by *homoioteleuton*, as it is called. This is in Ps. XIV., 5, where we now read, “there they feared a fear for God,” etc. The parallel has, “there they feared a fear *where there was no fear for*” The writer looking at the MS. from which he was copying after he had written the first *fear* (*pahadh*) saw the same word at its second occurrence and supposed it was the one he had just written, so went on with the rest of the verse. Strictly speaking these are all the variations we need to notice for our present purpose. Intentional changes of a text might be made by an inspired writer who adapts a composition (already known) to a new occasion. Quotation of one prophet by another would illustrate what is here meant, and it is possible, of course, that an author should issue two editions of the same lyric. The differences in such duplicates would not come within the scope of textual criticism. I do not care, therefore, to dwell upon some of the more marked differences which are discovered in the passages we are examining. In some of them there is a fair question whether the differences are of this sort or are real various readings. One example only :

Ps. XIV., 5b, 6.

*For God is in the generation of
the righteous
The counsel of the poor ye have put
to shame,
When God was his refuge.*

Ps. LIII., 6b.

*For God scattered the bows of thy
camper (=the one camping
against thee?)
Thou hast put to shame because
God hath rejected them.*

At first sight one is inclined to say the editor of Ps. LIII. has adapted the Psalm already known to him to some particular occasion—some signal judgment of God. In writing the parallel verses in Hebrew, however, we discover so many cases of similar words or letters,* that we cannot deny the possibility at least that in one of the two lines of transmission the verse had so faded as to show only single letters here and there, and that the scribe restored it according to his ability.

The inquiry up to the present point discovers then that, though the Massoretic method has preserved for us a text of great antiquity, that text has nevertheless suffered not a little in the period which elapsed between the original writing and its definite settlement in the present form. Further evidence in the same direction will meet us in the next division of the paper, which will appear in another number.

* הכישה and הכישו כי, [ע]צמות and צדיק, בדר and פור.